Stone Rolling With 'JFK' Project

By CLAUDIA ELLER

Oliver Stone has broken his silence on his next film project, "JFK," a drama furthering investigations into the assassination of President John F. Kennedy that is cranked to roll April 15 in Dallas.

Warner Bros. is cofinancing the estimated $35-40 million feature with Arnon Milchan's Regency Enterprises and Canal Plus as a separate outgrowth of the new partnership forged last month (*Daily Variety*, Jan. 14). Warners will distribute worldwide the film, on which Milchan will serve as exec producer, aiming for a late 1991 or early 1992 domestic release.

Kevin Costner officially is set for the central role of former New Orleans district attorney James Garrison — who brought the only criminal investigation connected to the assassination to trial in an effort to prove Kennedy was the victim of a conspiracy and coverup involving members of the CIA, the FBI and state and local officials and that Lee Harvey Oswald had been set up as their fall guy.

Additional talent deals are in the works with Gary Oldman to portray Oswald, Tommy Lee Jones to play New Orleans International Trade Mart director Clay Shaw and Sissy Spacek in the role of Garrison's wife.

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Elson Heads Up New IRS Int'l Sales Unit

Peter Elson, most recently senior v.p. of Cineplex Films International, has joined IRS Media to head up a newly formed foreign sales division as chief executive officer.

The launching of IRS Media International evolved from the 3½-year-old indie film company's present activities in production and most recent foray into domestic distribution (*Daily Variety*, Nov. 16, 1990). Move also augments sister company IRS Records' ongoing success overseas in the music arena.

"We formed the new division to broaden IRS' capabilities as a production company, giving us other

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Stone Ready To Roll Pic About Assassination Of JFK

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It is expected Jack Lemmon will take a cameo role and that Glenn Ford will also be featured in the film.

Stone said while at present only Costner's deal is solidified, contracts for the other aforementioned actors are "still being worked out." The cast, Stone added, "will be an interesting mix of some older, well-known names and some fresh faces."

The Oscar-winning director ("Platoon," "Born On The Fourth Of July") also confirmed that Garrison, currently an appeals court judge (and recently elected to his second 10-year term), will portray U.S. Supreme Court chief justice Earl Warren, whose Warren Commission Report declared Oswald the lone assassin 10 months after Kennedy was gunned down Nov. 22, 1963, in Dallas.

As Kennedy himself is not a central figure in the film, which deals with the aftermath and investigations of his murder, it is not expected anyone will play the president unless it is in a minor re-creation role.

While Stone was reluctant to discuss casting, it is believed one of the only times Kennedy will be seen in the film is when the historic Zapruder footage is submitted as evidence during the trial.

"JFK" will be produced by Stone and his longtime associate A. Kitman Ho as their sixth collaboration, following "The Doors," due out March 1, and "Born On The Fourth Of July," which they jointly produced, and "Talk Radio," "Wall Street" and "Platoon," which Ho coproduced.

From a screenplay by Stone and Zachary Sklar based on Garrison's book "On The Trail Of The Assassins," Jim Marrs' "Crossfire" and numerous public sources, "JFK" will illuminate additional information on Kennedy's assassination that has surfaced since Garrison's prosecution of the murder in 1969.

Immediately following Oswald's arrest, Garrison launched an investigation into the assassination and arrested a suspicious CIA pilot and anti-Castro mercenary named David Ferrie, whom he turned over to the FBI for questioning. Shortly thereafter, federal authorities released Ferrie and less than a year later the Warren Commission Report ratified the "official story" that Oswald acted alone.

Three years later, Garrison revived his investigation into the murder when Sen. Russell Long voiced

book but on new information tha came to light in the '70s and '80s,' he added.

Not wanting to divulge any par ticulars of the storyline, Ston would say only that the film will of fer a number of different theorie and "let the audience decide."

Stone, who also declined to ela borate on his personal opinio about Kennedy's death, explaine that he was driven to mount th project because "John Kenned was the godfather of my generatio and a lot of us believe he was mur dered for political reasons . . . An like Hamlet, we have to try an look back and correct the inaccura cies."

The director, who's been develop ing the work for some 2½ years acknowledged he will take "some creative liberties in the story for th sake of entertainment value an pacing, but cautioned, "I can't tak too much because the material i very important and sacred to th public."

Stone said at this juncture th script translates into "at least" three-hour film.

In preparing for the project Stone culled research from a num ber of citizens and eyewitnesse who devoted a large part of thei lives to investigate the murder pri vately — Gary Shaw, Larry Harris Larry Howard, Robert Groden an Fletcher Prouty, among seven to 1 others.

Half the production will be lense in Dallas on many actual sites su rounding the assassination, includ ing the Texas School Book Deposi tory, where Oswald allegedy fire the shots, and the film theate where he was arrested.

Stone said support from Dalla officials ("every single count department") has so far been "ex cellent."

Last week, 11,000 people, man of whom were on the streets the da the president was killed, turned ou for an open casting call in full '60 garb.

After six weeks in Dallas, th production will move to New Or leans, where Oswald lived the Sum mer preceding the assassination Stone said the film will also lens few days in Washington, D.C.

While the director has receive "an outpouring" of support for th project, he also met tremendous re sistance on some fronts. Reluctan to identify sources of friction, Ston said, "It's still going on and w have to deal with it . . . There are lot of obstacles and we've receive

vived his investigation into the murder when Sen. Russell Long voiced suspicion that the Warren Commission was wrong.

Garrison, who ultimately brought Clay Shaw to trial, uncovered evidence ignored by the Commission alleging that members of the U.S. intelligence community had conspired to kill Kennedy and were "hell-bent" on reversing the president's moves to lessen the tensions of the Cold War.

As Garrison points out in his book, his investigation was attacked by the federal government and the media discredited his case against Shaw and corroborated the Warren Commission's lone gunman theory.

In the film, Stone said, "We'll learn a lot about the facts which were ignored by the Warren Commission."

"We're looking at the old evidence and will present alternative scenarios not only based on Jim's [illegible] still going on and we have to deal with it . . . There are a lot of obstacles and we've received many warnings from people trying to stop us."

Stone said he is not concerned that his is one of several Kennedy assassination-related projects currently in the market, including "Libra," from Don DeLillo's novel theorizing that Kennedy's death was the work of anti-Castro activists.

"As far as I'm concerned, 'Libra' is fiction and has Lee Harvey Oswald pulling the trigger at the Depository. My film will prove otherwise," asserted Stone.

Regarding accusations that he and his talent agency CAA methodically went around town "killing" various projects on the same subject, including "Libra," to which A&M Films has long had the option, Stone quipped, "I'd love to believe that, it gives me a lot of power . . . Nobody stops projects from being made."